



An Interview with Nathan Rosen

by Steve Anderson – Gordon Feinblatt Rothman Hoffberger & Hollander LLC

Nathan Rosen has been on the cutting edge of law librarianship for many years. As law librarian at Credit Suisse First Boston, Rosen hosts the Legal Division's highly acclaimed and wildly popular "Emerging Technology Breakfast Roundtable" at the SLA Annual Conference.

Q *You're widely known for organizing the "Emerging Technology Breakfast" at SLA Conferences. Tell me a little about how and why you became a library leader in technology.*

A It is a value that I learned from both my children and my mother. My children regularly watch a TV show called "The Magic School Bus" and read Magic School Bus books. The main figure is the teacher, Ms. Frizzle. Her signature saying is "Take chances, make mistakes, get messy." That is a very valuable lesson regarding hot technologies and librarianship for the 21st century. We all have to move forward and try new things – take chances even when there is the chance, or even the probability, of making mistakes.

My mother regularly says that we only grow and develop by trying new things and accepting the pain of failure. If we limit ourselves to only those techniques and technologies that we know and can use effectively, we box ourselves into a small area of the universe. We have to expand our tools and approaches by getting ourselves out of the box, even though that practically guarantees our tripping, falling and skinning our knee. But if we hope to survive and prosper as a librarian and as a profession, we must do so.

This year, I was privileged to also speak at the Hot Technologies program organized by Thomas Fleming at the SLA convention.

Q *How do you use technology in your average workday? What are some of the high-tech projects you've instituted in your library?*

A My experience over the past three years in the Legal & Compliance Department of Credit Suisse First Boston has been wonderful. I was very lucky — I was hired to set up a brand new Law Library at Credit Suisse First Boston and was given the chance to do much, much more.

Now let's get more specific. Nearly all of the items I am going to discuss have been up and running for a while, but some are either new or being rolled out this quarter.

Telecommuted

For the last six months, I have been working one week each month from my mother's home in Kansas City while assisting in her care while she is dying of lung cancer.

Set up an intranet for the Legal department

The keys are to: keep it simple, clear and quick; try to have its organization apparent and intuitive to users; and make it content-heavy with a format appropriate for everyone.

Made e-mail the primary mode of receiving reference questions and distributing reference materials

Established e-mail routing lists with automatic redistribution by rules in Outlook

Scanned and converted documents for individual users and intranet content

Initially justified purchase of scanner by "costing out" what a firm would charge the department and popularized the service by scanning people's family pictures as screen savers and for saving huge amounts of time by OCRing documents instead of retyping them from scratch

Loaded CD-ROMs on LAN and provided training

Loaded forms on the intranet for submitting reference questions, routing requests and requests for office copies

Loaded the SydneyPlus catalog onto the intranet after cataloging the collection

Developed simple one-click basic Lexis-Nexis and Westlaw search pages on intranet

Developed databases for the department and loaded them on the intranet

Set up the Library as a training area, with a projector, lights, a pull-down screen and a PC with a zip drive

Developed and ran an entire comprehensive CLE program

Created a Web calendar with links to providers and scanned programs, sent monthly e-mail by subject and cataloged program materials and videos in the library and made them accessible via the intranet

The key is to always remember what we are here for — service. That is the message my mother gave me from the days when she ran the synagogue's library before I was born. Whatever technology or technique we try should be because we are working towards improving service, rather than because others are using it or that it would seem fun to try.

Q What are some of the most useful discussion lists for you, in terms of daily work, professional development, and recreation?

A Internet – GigaLaw.com Daily News and Weekly Update at www.gigalaw.com, LLRX Buzz at www.llrx.com, NewsScan Daily: Above the Fold at www.newsscan.com, Powerize.com at www.powerize.com, Rapidly Changing Face of Computing by Jeffrey Harrow at www.compaq.com/rcfoc, Search Engine Report by Danny Sullivan at www.searchenginewatch.com, Showdown News by Greg Notess at www.searchengineshowdown.com, Stop the Presses by Steve Outing at www.editorandpublisher.com and TVC Alert by Genie Tyburski at www.virtualchase.com.

Legal News – FindLaw Legal Grounds at www.findlaw.com and CyberSecuritiesLaw Tribune at www.cybersecuritieslaw.com, Today's Legal News by Law News Network and Law.com's Newswire at www.law.com and TechnoLawyer Community List at www.technolawyer.com.

Librarianship – BUSLIB-L in digest form, D-Lib Magazine at www.dlib.org, EBookNet Weekly News at www.ebooknet.com, Edupage at www.educause.edu/pub/edupage/edupage.html, FYI Update by Mary Ellen Bates at www.batesinfo.com, Lexis Publishing This Week – Librarian Edition at <http://infopro.lexis.com>, LAW-LIB in digest form, LLAGNY in digest form, News-On-News: The IFRA Trend Report at www.ifra.com, PLI E-Bulletin at www.pli.edu, PRIVATELAWLIB-L in digest form and SLANY-L in digest form.

Personal – Daily Grammar at www.dailygrammar.com, Innovation Weekly (\$18 per year) at www.newsscan.com, IntelliHealth Online at www.intelihealth.com, Word of the Day at www.dictionary.com/wordoftheday and WordTips at www.VitalNews.com/WordTips/.



Nathan Rosen at the Emerging Technologies breakfast at the SLA annual conference.

Q What print materials do you find helpful in keeping you up-to-date with technology and law librarianship?

A Here are some print resources I use for current awareness in the library and Internet areas: *Against the Grain*, *CyberSkeptics Guide to Internet Research*, *EContent*, *Information Today*, *Informed Librarian*, *Internet Law Researcher*, *Internet Lawyer*, *Internet Newsletter*, *Legal Information Alert*, *Legal Tech Newsletter*, *Online*, *Searcher* and *Wired*.

One should not and can not forget our own professional association's newsletters, like AALL, SLA, ALA and ASIS newsletters, along with the various section or division newsletters (such as the *Legal Division Quarterly*).

I also read a wide variety of legal publications to keep up with developments in the law. They range from dailies like the *New York Law Journal* to weeklies like the *National Law Journal* to monthlies like the *ABA Journal* or *New York State Bar Journal*. In total, I regularly read in print about thirty legal publications to keep up my knowledge in law.

Q Is there any "information gap" that you perceive? If so, describe the perfect Web site or publication that would fill that information need.

A My thought is that while there is a serious and ever growing "information gap" caused by the tidal wave of information (although most often what we are really experiencing is the explosion of data), the more significant problem is that everyone is falling farther and farther behind in knowledge. I am not even attempting to speak of wisdom, which is in even shorter supply and has become a very scarce commodity. What I and many of us really need is a wise sage. For some people, this image may be represented by their mother or father, while others may imagine Socrates, Plato, Einstein, but hopefully not HAL (from "2001: A Space Odyssey"). This Web site would communicate in the language and style that works best for the user and would assist the person in locating the answer (not data or even information). We have already seen some of the building blocks being developed, such as Ask Jeeves, natural language searching, voice recognition, and life-like computer generated voices with matching 3D images. The day will come before too long that you will be able to have a very realistic image of your parents speaking to you in their voice and being able to respond to a variety of inquiries with reasonable results. ■